

North Hill Expansion Plans Fail

BY SUSANNA SHOHAM

At Town Meeting Saturday, voters rejected a plan to expand the town-owned North Hill golf course from 9 to 18 holes.

A standing-room only crowd of 849 voters defeated Article 11, 255 votes to 209 votes in favor, after almost 2 hours of presentations and comments from opponents and proponents. The measure needed a 2-thirds vote to pass. This is the 4th consecutive year voters have been asked to consider expanding the golf course. In 1992, 1993 and 1994, Town Meeting voted to indefinitely postpone the plans.

Opponents cited environmental concerns as their main reasons against the golf course expansion. They worried that the expansion, which proposed building 9 holes on 90 acres adjacent to the current golf course, would contaminate the underlying aquifer and the town's water supply through fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals. Opponents also felt that an expanded course would use too much water. They cited a recent state decision that allows the town to increase its water use because it has been exceeding the allowable amount for the past 2 years.

Proponents of the expansion plans, including the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee, said an 18-hole course would bring in revenue of \$400,000 annually and would create "affordable recreation" for all ages. It would also make the town competitive with neighboring towns that are building municipal golf courses.

Opponents Holly Morris of Bay View Rd. and Kay Foster of Surplus St. gave a slide show presentation on the dangers to the town's aquifer and wells created by an expanded course. The plans endanger the town's "sole source of future and existing drinking water supply," said Morris. She said the town has not tested the 4 monitoring wells for the existing golf course since 1992 and she wanted to know why. These wells showed nitrates of 3.5 parts per million (ppm), she said. The state limit is 5 ppm, the federal limit is 10 ppm.

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"If chemicals or nitrates do show up in the monitoring wells, then its too late," said Morris.

Morris compared the possible contamination of the town's water with the osprey, a bird of prey threatened with extinction in the past 2 decades. "How much does it cost to buy an osprey when there are no more osprey?" Morris asked, adding, "How much does it cost to buy water when there is no more acceptable water?"

Selectman James Murphy, a proponent of the expansion plans, called Morris's statements and those of other opponents "a campaign of misinformation the likes of which I've never seen before."

Murphy said the selectmen would never do "anything to destroy our aquifer and environment." Selectmen and their appointed study committee found no evidence of any municipal golf course contaminating a water supply. Murphy said the aquifer was endangered more by the fertilizer and weed killers residents apply to their lawns than the chemicals a licensed agronomist would use on the golf course.

Murphy also argued that increased revenue from an 18-hole course would help keep taxes down and help senior citizens stay in the community. Duxbury's tax base is 96% residential, and the selectmen try to develop ideas that can supplement the revenue from taxes, he said.

Paul Costello of Delorenzo Drive said the North Hill land should be used for recreation not for "special interest groups like golfers."

"We defeated the golfers then, we should defeat them now," said Costello, referring to past Town Meetings that have rejected plans for an expanded golf course.

Opponents also expressed concerns about the present golf course's management, stating the expansion plans gave no indication who would manage the course.

"They haven't any idea of the management plans," said Charles "Cap" Kane of Harrison St. "Most would say we (the town) got the short end of the stick" because of past management problems.

In January, the town had to rescind the management contract it awarded to the current operators, the Gunnarson family, because of a complaint about the bidding process from one of the bidders. This is the 2nd time in 3 years the town has to repeat the bidding process. The Gunnarsons, who have operated the course for the past 12 years, were awarded an emergency 9-month contract until a new request for proposals can be prepared.